UNITY

CHURCH-DOOR PULPIT,

FOR

FREEDOM, FELLOWSHIP AND CHARACTER IN RELIGION.

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THE GOSPEL OF TO-MORROW.

A Sermon preached at the Installation of Rev. John Williams, at Walpole, N. H., June 12, 1884, by Rev. Edward E. Hale.

MATTHEW, x, 7.—"As ye go, preach, saying: The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

Every generation has its own pulpit, —its own sermons,—its own style of preaching,—and its own way of spending Sunday. Nay, it is clear enough that the young people are a little impatient of their elders in the same generation, and would be glad, if, more quickly than they do, they would carry their old-fashioned properties off the stage. And an occasion like this, when we look happily forward to the future of religious observance in this place, asks with curiosity, what are to be the subjects of discourse, and what the methods of ministry, which will interest the men who see the end of this century and the beginning of another. Grant that religion is always the same, —always the loving union and communion of man with God. Theology, which is the outward science of religion, is always changing—as all outward sciences change. Ritual, or the forms of religion, will be apt to change, as architecture changes, or other external fashions. The eternal principles clothe themselves in changing forms. By the merciful help of God, in the presence of His Holy Spirit, we are well rid of many of the Paganisms which have had the Christian name. Such bits of philosophy mixed with idolatry as the scholastic trinity are finding their own place, relegated indeed, into history. Such bits of metaphysics as the terrible Five Points of Calvin are now also put upon the shelves of the museums. Then the controversial habit of old preaching has also naturally enough died out, just in proportion as Christianity asserts itself as the religion not of controversy but of peace and love. Once more, the merely instinctive preaching of old times, where the one educated man in a community

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taught a congregation of ignorant people what they heard in no other way, has wholly passed by, for the hearers have now the same chances for books and study as has the preacher. Their Bibles are as good as his, and on the shelves of the public library are more books than he has in his study, and very likely better. Science itself, and the steady invention of the time, are the loudest of preachers, and are in every hour commenting on the text that God is good, and that his mercy endureth forever. In the midst of such advance the pulpit is not willing to fall back on the commonplace books of fifty or of a hundred years ago. It studies, at every such festival as to-day, the prospects of its own future, and the demands of the generation just now coming on the stage.

It seems as if we had been spending nineteen centuries in clearing away rubbish; as if at this best possible moment of this world of life and beauty we were just ready to attack our enemy. Indeed, one is reminded of Paul Jones' reply to Pearson when he was fighting him in the Poor Richard. Both ships were dismasted. Two port holes were blown into one, because the timbers between were shot away. It was late in the night. Jones was not firing. He was clearing away the wreck. Pearson, the English commander, hailed the Richard and asked if she had struck. Jones replied grimly, "I have not begun to fight!" Really the Unitarian church is in precisely that relation to Satan, the enemy of mankind. For fifty years, more or less, we have been clearing ship for action. We know now very distinctly who are our real allies, and who is our real adversary. And while that enemy would be glad to think we have struck our flag, we are, in fact, just ready to begin.

Such solemnities as these of to-day show that we are not unprepared for action.

The country is well aware that in a population of fifty million people not one-half attend religious observances at all,—not more than one quarter with any regularity. Our young men, fired with missionary zeal, know this perfectly well. There is not a thriving town but the Unitarian missionary may collect an audience in it—dissatisfied with the word and work of orthodox religion. Into such fields our young preachers are eager to go. What is the gospel which they are to carry there? What justifies the missionary of a Unitarian church in going into a Western city or a new manufacturing town in New England to which two or three larger and stronger churches have sent their ministers before him, in which perhaps they have established their congregations? I state the problem thus, because an answer to this question will say distinctly how the preaching of to-morrow is to differ from the preaching of yesterday. On every such occasion as this, even in a church like yours, well established and consecrated by long memories, this question should be put and answered. If our gospel have not its distinctive features, strong and well marked, which show it is more fit for the generation to come than any more orthodox gospels, we ought to give up our church organization. We should cease to be. It is because we have a special appeal to the generation now stepping upon the stage, that we keep up with dignity and pride such churches as this which invites us to-day, and that we welcome our honored and beloved brother here to what we hope will be a long and valuable ministry.

First, and chiefly, the duty of the pulpit in the next generation is to proclaim and illustrate the near coming of what the New Testament calls the Kingdom of God. Especially is this the business of the Unitarian pulpit. For, in a certain sense, the Unitarian pulpit has nothing else to do. There is possible a better social condition than exists to-day. The Unitarian pulpit is bound to tell any community what that social condition is,—and the method of improvement which leads to it. There shall be less disease, less pauperism, less poverty, less igno-

rance, less crime, less sin, less wickedness than there is to-day. It is the business of the pulpit—and especially of our pulpit—to show how these changes are to come. This rule of law—where is now lawlessness—is what Jesus Christ calls the reign of God, or the Kingdom of God. First, second and last, he says it is coming. Indeed he says it is at every man's hand. He says it is within us, if we will let God rule there. The ecclesiastics and other managers of the world, have much preferred to rule it themselves. They have not, at bottom, been so very anxious that God should be the only sovereign—and all governors, presidents and kings mere servants of mankind—as is Christ's plan and command. They have therefore substituted for the gospel reign of God—or Kingdom of God—this or that arbitrary fantasy. Sometimes the critic tells you that when Jesus spoke of the coming of the Kingdom of God, he meant the fall of Jerusalem—the triumph of Titus and Vespasian as their legions marched into the fated city. A grim reign of God was the order they introduced there. And again, at this hour, there is a group of people who will tell you that the visible heavens are to be rolled back like the curtain of a theatre, and that a chariot is to be seen approaching in which will sit the visible Jesus of Nazareth, released at last from his imprisonment of eighteen hundred and fifty years. All such fancies, absurd in themselves, do but turn away attention from the truth—that God is to direct this world. His kingdom is to come. Every year, somewhere and somehow it comes nearer. There is improvement here—there is improvement on that side; certainly and absolutely it comes. The business of the church is to help forward the coming. In the magnificent metaphor of the prophets—the church is to hew down the mountains and fill up the valleys that it may come. And the pulpit, of course, which is the voice of the church, is to show where and how and why all children of God are to work with him—to make more sure this victory of his Perfect Law.

When the pulpit of to-day fails, it fails because it does not attend to this duty steadily and definitely. When it succeeds it succeeds because the preacher knows distinctly what improvement is possible. He sees it before him in vision. He announces it steadily, in the concrete, as a possible reality. He persuades—he convinces—he commands all who come within his power to keep towards this specific end. The place where he lives works its way nearer heaven because he and his people thus direct themselves to a definite and present purpose. More and more do men know that they are with God—and that God is with them—and more do they assume the dignity and duty of princes of the blood royal. They go about their Father's business, and assist in the establishment of his kingdom.

One of the saddest histories I ever heard was the account given me by a man a little older than I am, of the way in which, fifty years before, the minister whom he loved and venerated had half led him, and wholly failed him. He was one of a group of young enthusiasts, who went weekly to the church of one of the eloquent preachers of that day—now forgotten. "Week by week," said the old man, "we hung upon his lips. 'Do you not see,' he said to us, 'That the times are ripe for reform?' Well, we did see it. 'Are you not willing to give up silver, and gold, and place to make this world over.' Well, we are willing. But alas! week after week, he never told us how. He had nothing to propose to us. He said the kingdom was coming, but he never told us how to clasp a shoe even, that it might more quickly come. Passionate appeal! and that was all."

"Sir," said my old friend, almost in tears, and his voice broke as he said it, "if that man had been half as wise as he was eloquent, I should not be what I am to-day. Had he led me, I would have followed him. Had he told me

what to do, I would have done it. I could have taught the poor, I could have nursed the sick. I could have given all I had in charity. I could have stood in the pulpit. I could have worked at the oar as a galley slave. Had that man known what he wanted to do—and had he told me how to do it, I would and should have obeyed him. But he did not know. These were words of his. And my life has gone now—none the better for his leading."

The preacher of to-morrow is not to repeat that error. Where he is he is to hew down the mountain and fill up the valley. Whether he speak to two people or to two hundred,—that is all one—he with them, they with him are to move forward on a definite plan that God shall reign in that place. Is he preaching in Corinth, they will make it a better Corinth—is it Cenchrea or Sardis, it shall be the possible Cenchrea, the possible Sardis, which they are working for. "We are not many", he will say to that handful, "but we are on God's side. I am not here simply to save your soul, or *your* soul. But we three together are here, that this town shall be saved. It is to be purer, more peaceable, gentle, and better worth living in—it is to be more like the Kingdom of Heaven—and here God's will is to be done. For this I have come here as God lives—in this work you and I will join."

I say this is the view of the Liberal Church—this is the gospel we have to proclaim. It is not the view of the sects. The Roman Catholic missionary comes to you to persuade you to submit your opinion to the pope's. The Episcopal missionary wants to improve the decorum of your worship. My Evangelical friends hope to save here and there a brand foreordained to be saved, from the burning. We are indifferent as to ritual. We are careless as to the statement or theory of revelation. We have no fear but God can save the brands. But we do mean to have his kingdom come. First, second and last, we proclaim that coming as a speedy certainty, and we work to bring it in.

Our second distinction is, that literally and in good faith, we proclaim it to all sorts and conditions of men. In form and theory other preachers do the same. But how empty the form—when to a congregation of a hundred, I step forward and say: "Dear friends, I have asked you all to come here because my marching orders are, to preach the gospel to every creature. But I regret to inform you that only a few of you are elect; that by far the greater number of you are pre-destined to be damned. For the purposes of this occasion we will speak as if all of you could be saints. But as a matter of theology we know that you were all born totally depraved and that there is no help in you." From the perpetual annoyances of these contradictions between the creeds and common sense, we are most happily free. Literally and in good faith, we want the help of everybody here in Walpole to make this Walpole the best possible Walpole—to bring into it the Kingdom of God. "What?—if a man have broken down in drink, do you want him?" Of course we want one such lost sheep, more than we want ninety and nine just men of that stamp who tell us, proudly, that, for them, they need no repentance.

Third. To each and all, the Unitarian preacher has one lesson. He addresses himself to no one class or condition. He has the same word for the laborer, who in his working dress looks in at the evening talk—just leaving the trench where he has been laying a sewer, or for the wife of the chief steward, who has driven down to the Sunday morning service in her carriage. To high and low—to wise and unwise—to learned and ignorant—to sinner and saint he preaches. And in substance he says to them one thing and the same.

He tells them that they will not save the world by learning.

They will not argue it out of its diseases or its crimes.

They will not govern it out of its debaucheries and follies.

They will not teach it how to live in any schools or colleges.

He tells them that they will save it by character. They are the saviors. They are the mediators. And they are to bring the world to be another heaven, by living themselves the lives of the Sons of God.

It is, perhaps, here especially that our preaching differs from that requisite in any form of orthodoxy. If the salvation of the world or the hearer depend on his allegiance to any dogma, or any confession, then that dogma must be taught from the learned to the unlearned. Then the man of brain has a better chance than the fool. Then the man of books has a better chance than the ignorant. Certainly the man of fine brain fibre and quick logic can work out that wonderful parry and thrust of the "plan of salvation," as no dull peasant of us can pretend to do. With all such thrust and parry we have nothing to do. Religion must be propagated by contagion, not by any creed or catechism. Be loving yourself and you will make others love. Be just yourself and you will make your neighbors just. Be true yourself and men will not lie to you. Be pure yourself and their language will grow pure. Good men make good men. Good women make good women. Good children make good children. And there is no one of us so dull, so stupid, of brain fibre so coarse, or of intelligence so stammering, but that he can be pure, peaceable, gentle, loving and true. Each one of us then, can be counted into this gospeling by which the new Walpole—the new Cheshire County—the new New England—the new New Hampshire is to be born. Take for illustration the work wrought by the slave Uncle Tom, in Mrs. Stowe's novel. There is a book which went round the world. It was translated into fifty languages, and in more than one way it changed history. The noble lady who translated it into the Siamese language went back to her stately castle when her work was finished; she called together all her slaves and said to them, "you are free." How is it that Uncle Tom, the hero of this book, works such wonders? It is not for anything that he has read; he cannot read. It is not for any dogma that he can teach; he does not pretend to be a teacher. His power comes from what he is—child of God; son of God. True child of God; brave son of God! He talks with God, he walks with God, he communes with God. And it is with this power of God that he sways all sorts and conditions of men. Take that as an instance, I say, of what our preachers have a right to say to every man, woman and child who hears them. It is not to say "one in ten of you is foreordained to salvation." It is not to say "one in twenty of you is elect to be an apostle of the Lord." It is not to speak to the high or to the mighty, or the learned that they are sent. Literally it is to every child of God, no matter how weak or how foolish; to the drunkard in the gutter as to the prince upon the throne, this apostle is to say, "God has something for each and all of you to do." "But, Lord, I do not believe the fourth and fifth articles, or I cannot understand the third point, or I do not know how to reconcile the second book of Thessalonians with the third chapter of the book of Proverbs." "Who cares what you know," is the reply, "who cares for what you understand?" What the good God wants is goodness. Purity will compel purity. Peace will make peace. Gentleness is caught by contagion, and lo, there is more gentleness! And you, though you be only a school-girl with other school-girls walking along the highway, why, you have your part and you bear your share in this great commission, in which He is making old things to become new, in which His kingdom comes in this very village of your home.

For indeed, in this gospel of to-day and to-morrow, the gospel of the future, if I am to call it so, relies on the great army of children as a part of its work-

ing force. They are not outside its church, they are inside its church from the beginning. They are born in it when they are born. The preacher of to-morrow, therefore, has not to go into this imagined missionary ground I am describing, in the heart of our own New England, and call together as his allies only the handful of those who think they have experienced religion. He does not say to them: "You are the only Christians and all these others are Gentiles or heathen." He says, "As all of you who are born in America are Americans, and cannot be otherwise if you would, so all of you who are born under this Christian flag are Christians. From your birth you have been swayed by Christian law, and I summon you to stand with me and the leader of mankind in this work which we have in hand of bringing the Kingdom of God into this town."

Fourth. And this apostle and these whom he enrolls under his banner, stand for Unity wherever they carry their gospel. Thus do they answer the longing cry of our time. This is what the Unitarian church is for. From this wish it takes its name. Its business is to unite. It is to unite the rich and the poor; to unite the native and the foreigner; to unite the master and his workman; to unite the teacher and the scholar; to unite old enemies and make them fast friends; to unite jealous rivals and make them help each other; to unite the different sects which are, and must be in the great heritage of God, so that the voices of their song shall rise to Him in harmony. It was this special work which, as I said, gave us our name. You will not find that name, or the Latin word "*Unitarius*," from which it is derived, before the sixteenth century. In the midst of the civil wars of Poland, which had been a place of refuge of men of all religions, some master mind first blocked out a plan of Toleration, by which Romanists, Calvinists, Lutherans and Socinians should fare equally well before the law. He was a century in advance of mankind. As one of these jarring sects after the other obtained supremacy, each tore to pieces the compact of Unity or toleration, until none were left who were true to it but the despised Socinians. They were true to it in power, as they were true to it in their weakness. They earned therefore the honorable name which has decended even to us, of being the *United*,—we are those who are committed to Unity—in Latin we are *Unitarii*. We have shown that preachers of widely parted theories can preach in our pulpits. We have shown that Christ may have followers who have a thousand theories of his person. For we know that the God whose children we are, delights everywhere in the Unity in Variety—which is the Wonder of Wonders in the wonderful world of his Law. Our missionary comes into this village or that State, which he finds divided against itself by some traditionof the elders. Was Jefferson or Hamilton the greater statesman? Was Channing or Edwards the more clear-headed in his philosophy? Ought the railway to have come in on the line of the canal or of the turnpike? Now no house divided against itself shall ever stand. The Christian minister and the Christian church stand for Unity in all such difference. To take an admirable illustration from the English church of our time, the Broad Church can include the High Church and the Low Church both. It can enjoy the noblest Ritual of the High. It can join in the most devout aspiration of the Low. Harmony from a thousand voices. The Unity which all nature shares—as the fresh leaves of a million trees, each with its own shape and line, combine in the glory of one forest in the perfect beauty of a day like this. The Unity, let me better say, of the infant Church, where men as different as Matthew, the practical—Paul, the enthusiast, and John the poet, unite together in this Unity of the spirit to carry one gospel of glad-tidings over the world. The Church of to-morrow offers herself for such service. Not content with reading

reverently the words of the Master's prayer,—not content with repeating that prayer, to make it her own—church and minister consecrate themselves in every such service of glad solemnity as this, to new life and new effort.

"That they all may be one as thou, Father, art in me," he said, "and I in thee,—my prayer is that these all may be made perfect in one."

To proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God, that he may be the ruler here where we live; to proclaim it and to live for it.

To summon together in glad enthusiasm all sorts and conditions of men to live for it and to prepare for it.

To show them that they are to bring it in, not by talk but by life, not by creed but by Character.

And so to do this, that in the doing, the jar and jealousy which have parted men shall give way for peace,—this, in brief, is the work of the ministry of union—for the Uniting or Unite-arian ministry. It is to this ministry that this day we gladly consecrate anew this minister and this people.

Our "Church-Door Pulpit" hints its purpose in its name. It aims to furnish fortnightly a transfigured tract,—transfigured by being paid for, and by representing not so much a given system of beliefs as the emphasis, in somewhat varying beliefs, on "Freedom, Fellowship and Character in Religion;" this tract to be taken from the rack or table at the church-door to the home, there to serve its little mission by reading in the family, lending to a neighbor, mailing to a distant friend, etc. We hope the plan may be destined to wide adoption by Liberal churches as part of their regular church-work.

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